

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**STB DOCKET NO. AB-842X**

**Almono LP - Abandonment Exemption - In Allegheny County, PA**

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, Almono LP (Almono or railroad) filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 for exemption from the provisions of 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon a line of railroad in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania (PA). The rail line proposed for abandonment extends from the plant of shipper MetalTech to an interchange point with CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) north of CSXT's Glenwood Yard in Hazleton. The subject line is stub-ended and does not have any mileposts. The total distance is approximately 2 miles and the line is located along the north bank of the Monongahela River. A second and only other shipper on the line is Hantz Locomotive Repair (Hantz), which operates out of a roundhouse located at approximately the midpoint of the line.

Almono also seeks exemption from 49 U.S.C. 10904 [offer of financial assistance (OFA) procedures] and 49 U.S.C. 10905 [public use conditions]. Almono contends that the exemption from these provisions is necessary to allow the only two shippers on the line to operate it as a private spur following abandonment without incurring costs associated with common carrier operations. Almono states that these shippers would continue to use the line at roughly current levels for at least several years. However, in the petition, Almono notes that the rail line may eventually be removed to facilitate Almono's redevelopment of the right-of-way (ROW) for non-railroad purposes. Therefore, Almono is also seeking authority to remove the rail, ties, and other railroad equipment.

A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to this report.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE**

The topography in the immediate vicinity of the ROW is relatively flat and land use is largely commercial and industrial. The width of the ROW is generally 30 feet. According to Almono, MetalTech is the only regularly active shipper on the subject line and ships approximately 11 to 16 carloads of galvanized steel coils per week. In 2002, MetalTech shipped

approximately 70,000 tons of steel coil by rail. This represents roughly 20 percent of MetalTech's total output. The remaining 80 percent of MetalTech's production is shipped by truck. Hantz's use of the line is sporadic and it moved only two locomotives in the eight months prior to the filing of the subject petition.

Almono acquired the subject line in 2002 from the Monongahela Connecting Railroad Company (Mon Con). Mon Con was a Class III switching and terminal railroad located in Pittsburgh, PA. Mon Con was incorporated in 1885 and began operations in 1887, and was a wholly owned subsidiary of LTV Steel Corporation (LTV). Mon Con served LTV's steel mill operations in the area until LTV declined in recent years and LTV is currently being liquidated in bankruptcy. Mon Con had previously abandoned all of its rail lines except the two miles that were acquired by Almono and are the subject of this proceeding.

There are four railroad structures along the subject line that are 50 years of age or older. They include a 300-foot by 180-foot roundhouse and three additional support buildings. Almono estimates that the roundhouse was constructed approximately 80 to 100 years ago, and the support buildings approximately 60 to 80 years ago.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The railroad submitted environmental and historical reports that indicate that the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities. The railroad served these reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) had not responded to the railroad's environmental report at the time this Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared. However, the proposed abandonment would not be expected to adversely affect prime farmland because of the urban and industrial nature of the surrounding land uses.

Because the subject line would continue to be operated as a private spur following abandonment, there would be no immediate impact on the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities, or diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in impacts to air quality or the local transportation network. However, Almono may eventually salvage the rail line to facilitate redevelopment of the ROW for non-railroad purposes. Depending on the extent of rail shipments at that time, if any, redevelopment of the ROW could result in the diversion of freight from railcars to trucks. Any such diversion would be expected to have minimal impacts on the local transportation network. For example, using a railcar to truck ratio of one railcar for every four trucks, diverting MetalTech's 11 to 16 railcars per week would result in approximately 40 to 60 total additional truck trips on local roads per week.

(Hantz's very infrequent movement of locomotives could not be diverted to trucks). As summarized in the railroad's environmental report, the additional energy consumption resulting from the diversion of MetalTech's rail freight to trucks would range from approximately 6,100 gallons to 422,000 gallons of diesel fuel per year. The lower figure would occur if the freight is trucked approximately 10 miles to a transload facility for continued movement by rail. The higher figure would occur if the freight is trucked the entire distance to its ultimate destinations. In either case, these additional fuel consumption values would be insignificant when compared to statewide annual fuel consumption values.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Pittsburgh District expressed no objections to the proposed abandonment and concluded that a Department of the Army permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344) would not be required.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Pennsylvania Field Office stated that Federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species or critical habitat are not known to be in the project area with the exception of transient species. Therefore, adverse impacts to these resources would not be expected.

The PA Department of Environmental Protection noted that the project area is not located in the PA Coastal Zone Management Area.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had not responded to Almono's environmental report at the time this EA was prepared.

Almono is not aware of any hazardous waste sites or hazardous material spill sites on the subject ROW.

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Geodetic Survey (NGS) identified five geodetic station markers that may be affected if salvaging activities were to occur. Although Almono does not intend to immediately conduct any salvaging activities, SEA recommends a condition to address the NGS concern in the event that salvaging plans are subsequently developed by Almono.

The PA Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau of Historic Preservation (the State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO) concluded in an October 30, 2003 letter (ER 03-2667-003-B) that the proposed abandonment would have no effect on the Monongahela Connecting Railroad and Roundhouse, a property listed in or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The SHPO added, however, should the railroad become aware, from any source, that previously unidentified historic or archaeological properties are located at the project site, or that the project activities would have an effect on these properties, the SHPO should be contacted immediately. Accordingly, SEA has recommended a consultation condition to address the SHPO's concerns in this area.

## **CONDITIONS**

We recommend that the following environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified five geodetic station markers that could be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, if the railroad elects to proceed with any salvaging activities, the railroad shall notify the NGS 90 days prior to these activities.
2. If prior to consummating abandonment, the railroad becomes aware of previously unidentified historic or archaeological properties on the right-of-way, or that the abandonment would have an effect on known properties, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) shall be consulted immediately. The results of any consultations shall be reported to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and, therefore, no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

## **PUBLIC USE**

If abandonment of the rail line does take place, the ROW may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

## **TRAILS USE**

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Surface Transportation Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 20 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. However, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of ROWs as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

## **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at 202-565-1592 or mail inquiries to the Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS**

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of David Navecky, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to STB Docket No. AB-842X in all correspondence addressed to the Board. Questions regarding this environmental assessment should be referred to David Navecky at 202-565-1593 (naveckyd@stb.dot.gov).**

Date made available to the public: November 24, 2003

Comment due date: **December 23, 2003**

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

Attachment

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
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Decision ID No. 34060

